



Review Article

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AHARA AND VIHARA IN AYURVEDA: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LIVER HEALTH

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Abstract

In Ayurveda, the *Yakrut* —referred to as liver —is considered a vital organ that governs metabolic transformation, detoxification, digestion, and the regulation of *Pitta Dosha*. It is identified as the root (*Moola*) of *Rakta Dhatu* and is functionally associated with *Raktavaha Srotas* (channels of blood circulation). Ayurvedic texts recognize *Yakrut* as a *Matruja Avayava* (organ of maternal origin), playing a crucial role in fetal development and postnatal physiological balance. The liver's core functions include maintaining digestive fire (*Agni*), purifying blood, transforming nutrients, and managing lipid metabolism. Imbalances in liver function manifest in conditions such as *Kamala* (jaundice), *Yakrutodara*, and fatty liver disease. Ayurvedic management emphasizes *Pathya-Apathya* (do's and don'ts) in diet and lifestyle, with a preference for foods that are bitter, astringent, light, dry, and cooling to pacify excess *Pitta* and eliminate toxins. Additionally, personalized lifestyle interventions—including yoga, proper sleep, and timely expression of natural urges—enhance hepatic function. Herbs like *Kalmegha*, *Bhumyamalaki*, *Guduchi*, etc. are recommended for their hepatoprotective and immunomodulatory effects. This holistic approach not only supports the treatment of liver disorders but also upholds the Ayurvedic aim of preserving health through preventive care.

Keywords - *Yakrut*, Liver health, Ayurveda, *Pathya-Apathya*, *Agni*, Fatty liver, Liver detoxification, etc.

INTRODUCTION

The liver, referred to as *Yakrut* in Ayurveda, is one of the essential organs in the body. It plays a role in metabolism, detoxification, digestion, and the management of nutrients. In the context of Ayurveda, *Yakrut* is placed within the *Raktavaha Srotas*¹ (the channels for blood circulation) and is regarded as the Moola² (root) of *Rakta Dhatu* (blood tissue). Issues related to *Yakrut* impact not only the blood but also the *Pitta Dosha* since the liver serves as the primary location for *Pitta*.

***Sthana* (Location)**

Yakrut is located in the *Urdhva Jatharagni Pradesh* (upper part of the abdomen), close to *Amasaya* (stomach).

Anatomical Location of *Yakrut*³

We can find indirect references of the anatomical location of the liver. While explaining the anatomy of *Hrdaya*⁴ – heart, it is said that the liver is located towards the right of the heart (considering that heart is mostly a right sided organ) and inferior to it. This is exactly the anatomical position of the liver as explained in modern anatomy. It is located in the right hypochondrium region i.e. right upper quadrant of the abdomen.

Etymology of *Yakrut*

The word *Yakrut* is made up of two terms –

Ya – means maintaining

Krit – means doing

यं संयमं करोति, कृ तुक् च। शब्दस्तोमनिधि।⁵

Samyama – maintenance and *Krit / Krut* – doing many types of useful functions like formation and distribution of blood and maintenance of health are its main functions. The organ which maintains (*Ya*) and does (*Krit / Krut*) is called *Yakrut / Yakrut*.

Liver and Spleen are related to *Ranjaka Pitta*, a subtype of *Pitta* located in these organs. The *rasa* i.e. the first tissue formed from the digested food essence (*Aahara rasa*) transforms into *Rakta Dhatu* (blood or blood cells).

Embryological formation - In the fetus / embryo – the liver and spleen, both are formed from *Shonita* – blood. This is also a common connection between these two organs, having

the same origin. *Yakrut* is a *Matruja Avayava*⁶ – being a soft organ it is said to be derived predominantly from mother. It is one of the maternal factors – *Matruja Bhava*, to manifest in the child.

Function:

- *Raktaprasadana* (blood purification)
- *Pitta-Sthana* (site of *Pitta*)
- Involved in digestion and metabolic transformation via *Dhatvagni*.

Yakrut plays a vital role in:

- Maintaining the balance of ***Pitta Dosha***.
- Enhancing Agni (digestive fire) by ***Deepana*** and ***Pachana*** and metabolic activities ***Dhatvagni*** (at the tissue level).
- This contributes to the proper formation of ***Rasa*** and ***Rakta Dhatu*** (Plasma and Blood). The liver also facilitates the metabolism of ***Meda Dhatu*** (fat tissue), helping to maintain a healthy fat balance.
- It aids in the removal of ***Ama*** (toxins) from the body, acting as a natural detoxifier.
- Through these functions, the liver helps pacify aggravated *Pitta* and ***Rakta Prasadaka*** (purifies the blood), promoting systemic balance and well-being.

Disorders like *Yakrutodara*, *Kamala* (jaundice), *Halimaka*, and *Pleeha-Vridhhi* indicate liver dysfunction. Fatty liver, or hepatic steatosis, occurs due to an overabundance of calories, insulin resistance, obesity, alcohol consumption, or an unhealthy diet, resulting in the buildup of fat in liver cells without immediate inflammation. It is categorized as either NAFLD or AFLD depending on the role of alcohol. Fatty liver interferes with lipid metabolism, resulting in elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels. This results in insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, and high blood pressure. Ongoing inflammation and disruptions in coagulation increase the risk of thrombosis. Over time, these alterations lead to atherosclerosis, heart attacks, and strokes, positioning fatty.

DISCUSSION

To ensure optimal liver function, it is important to adhere to a structured and nourishing dietary plan *Aahara* along with a balanced way of living (*Vihara*). The liver, being

a vital organ responsible for metabolism, detoxification, and blood purification, requires regular intake of foods that possess specific *Rasa* and *Guna* to function efficiently and stay disease-free.

According to Ayurveda, choosing the right foods and herbs according to their *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya* (potency), and *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect) is vital for maintaining a healthy liver. Tastes such as *Tikta* (bitter), *Kashaya* (astringent), and *Madhura* (sweet) are considered beneficial for pacifying aggravated *Pitta Dosha*, enhancing Agni (digestive fire), and nourishing *Dhatus*.

Similarly, foods and herbs that possess *Laghu* (light), *Ruksha* (dry), and *Sheeta* (cooling) attributes assist in alleviating excess fat, *Ama* (toxins), and inflammation that can burden the liver. Including such attributes in daily diet and routine can significantly reduce the risk of liver disorders such as fatty liver, hyperlipidemia, hepatitis, and associated metabolic conditions.

RASA ⁷	➤ <i>Tikta (Bitter)</i> – Detoxifying, clears <i>Ama</i> (toxins), pacifies <i>Pitta</i> ➤ <i>Kashaya (Astringent)</i> – Strengthens liver tissues and reduces inflammation
GUNN	➤ <i>Laghu</i> (Light) – Easy to digest, enhances <i>Agni</i> ➤ <i>Ruksha</i> (Dry) – Reduces excess <i>Kapha</i> and fat ➤ <i>Sheeta</i> (Cooling) – Balances <i>Pitta</i> and soothes inflammation
VIRYE	➤ <i>Sheeta</i> (Cooling) – Calms <i>Pitta Dosha</i> and protects liver tissue. ➤ In some cases, <i>Ushna Virya</i> herbs are used in small amounts to improve digestion (e.g., ginger, black pepper)

Thus, to protect liver health and support its essential functions, it is imperative to adopt a steady and nutritious eating plan that is abundant in liver-friendly tastes and qualities. The following section elaborates further on the ideal *Aahara* (dietary choices) and *Vihara* (lifestyle practices) recommended in Ayurveda for maintaining long-term liver vitality and preventing disease progression.

In Ayurveda, the liver (*Yakrut*) is considered a vital *Pitta* dominant organ responsible for metabolic transformation (*Agni*), blood purification, and toxin breakdown. To support liver detoxification and restore its balance, it is essential to follow a specific *Pathya-Apathya* (Do's and Don'ts) regimen focusing on diet (*Aahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihara*).

Liver Health Food Itinerary – *Pathya* (Do's) and *Apathya* (Don'ts) ⁸

Category	<i>Pathya</i> (Do's)	<i>Apathya</i> (Don'ts)
Water	10–12 glasses of lukewarm water	Cold water
Pulses	<i>Mung dal</i> (Green gram)	<i>Urad dal</i> (Black gram), <i>Arhar dal</i> (Pigeon pea), <i>Kulath dal</i> (Horse gram), <i>Masoor dal</i> (Red lentil), <i>Moth dal</i> (Mat bean), <i>Chana masala</i> (Spiced chickpeas), <i>Chole</i> (White chickpeas), <i>Rajma</i> (Kidney beans), Soyabean
Vegetables	<i>Pumpkin</i> , <i>Lauki</i> (Bottle gourd), <i>Karela</i> (Bitter gourd), <i>Turai</i> (Ridge gourd), <i>Kushmand</i> (Ash gourd), <i>Shigru</i> (Drumstick), <i>Parval</i> (Pointed gourd), Garlic, Turmeric, <i>Amla</i> (Indian gooseberry), <i>Amaranth</i> leaves, Onion	Peas, Spinach, Radish, Mushroom, <i>Arbi</i> (Taro root), <i>Aalu</i> (Potato), Paneer (Cottage cheese), Tofu, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Tomato, Brinjal (<i>Eggplant</i>), Lady finger (<i>Okra</i>)
Fruits	<i>Draksha</i> (Grapes), <i>Dadim</i> (Pomegranate), <i>Nariyal</i> (Coconut), <i>Amla</i> (Gooseberry), Papaya, Beetroot, <i>Khajoor</i> (Dates), Kiwi, Berries, Apple, Avocado, Water chestnut, Banana, Jamun (<i>Black plum</i>), Peaches	Guava, Mango, Muskmelon, Raw mango, <i>Anjeer</i> (Fig)
Grains	<i>Daliya</i> (Broken wheat), Barley, Ragi (<i>Finger millet</i>), Rice	Peanut
Beverages	Buttermilk, Herbal tea	Curd, Soft drinks, Alcohol, Soda, Tea, Coffee, Energy drinks, Full-fat milk
Herbs & Spices	Ginger, Garlic, Black pepper, <i>Pippli</i> (Long pepper), <i>Tulsi</i> (Holy basil), Carom seeds (<i>Ajwain</i>), <i>Asafoetida</i> (<i>Hing</i>), Cumin seeds, Fenugreek seed powder, Coriander, Fennel, Clove	–
Others	Cow's ghee, Filtered oil	Refined oil, Vanaspati ghee, Pickles (<i>Achar</i>), Papad, Eggs, Meat, Fish, Non-veg items, Junk food, Fermented foods, Bread, Preserved/packaged food, Sauces, Wafers.

Lifestyle Recommendations (*Vihāra*)⁹

- **Sleep:** A restful sleep of 7–8 hours at night is essential for liver repair and hormonal balance. Avoid daytime sleeping and staying up late at night, as this disturbs the natural *Dosha* cycle. Practices like head and foot massage (*Shiro/Pada Abhyanga*) using medicated oils like *Pinda tailam* before sleep are calming and rejuvenate for the liver and nervous system.
- **Natural Urges:** Do not suppress natural bodily urges such as urination, defecation, flatus, vomiting, sneezing, belching, yawning, hunger, thirst, tears, and breathing after exertion, as doing so causes *Vata* imbalance and toxic accumulation in the liver.
- **Main meal** should be taken during **midday** (best digestive fire). Avoid **heavy dinner**; keep it light and warm. Avoid **eating late at night** or immediately before sleeping. **Chew food properly** to enhance *Agni* and prevent *Ama* formation.
- **Yoga Asanas:** Practice *Asanas* that gently massage the abdominal organs and enhance liver circulation like *Balasana*, *Ardha Matsyendrasana*, *Padahasthasana*, *Matsyasana*, *Setubandhasana*, *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, *Bhujangasana*, *Dhanurasana*, and *Trikonasana*.
- **Brisk Walk:** A brisk walk for 15–20 minutes daily is beneficial, but should be avoided immediately after meals to prevent indigestion.
- **Vyayama (Exercise):** Engage in moderate physical activity for 20–30 minutes daily to stimulate metabolism, burn toxins (*Ama*), and support *Rakta Dhatu* (blood tissue) purification.

Ayurvedic single Herbs for Liver Support-

1. *Bhumyamalaki (Phyllanthus niruri)* – Anti-viral, Hepatoprotective
2. *Kalmegha (Andrographis paniculata)* – Bitter tonic, antipyretic.
3. *Kutki (Picrorhiza kurroa)* – *Pitta* balancing, enhances bile secretion.
4. *Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)* – Rasayana, Immunity booster, improves liver enzymes.

This is a general dietary and lifestyle guideline for maintaining liver health. *Apathya* (undesirable items) should be avoided, especially in cases of liver imbalance. However, when the liver is functioning optimally and overall health is stable, such items may be consumed occasionally and in very limited quantities, with proper discretion.

It must be noted that *Aahar* (diet) and *Vihara* (lifestyle) should always be tailored according to individual ***Prakriti*** (body constitution), ***Bala*** (strength/immunity), ***Agni*** (digestive/metabolic capacity), ***Desha*** (geographical habitat), ***Kaala*** (seasonal and temporal

factors), and **Vaya** (age group). Personalized recommendations ensure better efficacy and safety in promoting and preserving liver and overall health.

CONCLUSION

In Ayurveda, the liver (*Yakrut*) is considered a vital organ that plays a crucial role in metabolism, blood detoxification, and the regulation of *Pitta*. To sustain liver health, it is essential to adopt a diet that soothes *Pitta*, is light, and nourishing, coupled with specific herbs and daily routines. By following preventive dietary practices and utilizing traditional herbs, numerous liver-related conditions can be successfully managed or avoided, in line with the *Ayurvedic* principle of "*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*" (preserving the health of those who are already healthy).

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